

Industrial Rezoning Focus Group

July 30th, 2007 Meeting Summary

Background:

During the July 10, 2007 City Council meeting, a public hearing was held to consider the rezoning of three adjacent parcels from industrial to residential. During the hearing, city staff pointed out that both the City of Asheville Comprehensive Plan and the Sustainable Economic Development Strategic Plan prioritize the preservation of industrial zoned land. City Council requested that staff hold a focus group of key stakeholders to consider the current balance between the appropriate level of industrial preservation and the demand for other land uses that has resulted in several recent rezoning requests.

Focus Group:

A focus group of several key stakeholders was held on Monday, July 30, 2007 at the Office of Economic Development to discuss possible strategies allowing for the rezoning of industrial land.

Shannon Tuch introduced the attendees to several key considerations:

Previous rezoning requests have been granted by City Council despite staff concerns regarding the preservation of industrial land specified in both the City of Asheville Comprehensive Plan and the Sustainable Economic Development Strategic Plan. Each rezoning request did present merits to the change, thus prompting Council to approve the requests. The differences between each rezoning request indicate that it would be difficult to identify standard criteria by which to evaluate all industrial rezoning requests.

A large portion of land along the river contains either industrial land uses or is suitable for industrial uses, yet demand for residential in the same area is increasing.

There are three industrial zoning classifications:

- **Industrial**: The standard industrial land use classification that prevents residential and limits commercial. Accounts for approximately one half of all industrial zoned land within Asheville, and includes the Asheville airport.
- **Commercial Industrial**: Designed to allow a mix of commercial and industrial land uses, but also allows multi-family residential. In the past, commercial uses tended to be wholesalers. Recently, the trend has been to build multi-family housing. Accounts for approximately one half of all industrial zoned land within Asheville.
- **Light Industrial**: New classification for which the city has received a few applications already. Caters to smaller, cleaner industrial uses and prevents “heavy and dirty” industrial uses.

Based on these considerations, the focus group attendees developed the following questions and/or suggestions:

1. Is it possible to provide incentives to owners of industrial properties to maintain their land as industrial?

Assuming that the tax burden of vacant industrial land can be burdensome to land owners, and that these owners may be receiving purchase offers from developers, the focus group would like staff to explore the possibility of offering these owners incentives not to sell.

2. Is it possible to engage the private sector in such a way that they can provide a better link between potential investors and industrial development?

3. Considering the differences between the three categories of industrial zoning, is it possible that some are more appropriate than others for protecting industrial land in Asheville?

Since developers are taking advantage of the multi-family allowance on land zoned as Commercial Industrial, the city may want to consider rezoning this land to one of the other two industrial land uses, or modify it to discourage residential use.

4. Can the *time* involved in zoning industrial land be streamlined?

Can we help existing or new industrial businesses to build or expand by making the rezoning process quicker and easier?

5. Can the *cost* of zoning industrial land be streamlined?

6. Look at industrial zoning site by site and determine appropriate means to protect.

Many sites that are currently zoned as industrial have unique location qualities that make them more or less susceptible to rezoning. Each site should be reviewed and specific goals and protection strategies identified.

7. Establish a stakeholder committee to establish rezoning criteria or to advise staff.

Determine if it is possible to develop a list of criteria under which any industrial rezoning request can be measured. If not, would it be possible to establish a stakeholder committee for each rezoning request who could make a recommendation to Council?

8. Consider expanding borders of industrial zoned land around key industrial sites to provide additional protection against neighborhood complaint.

9. Adopt different strategies for accommodating existing industries and attracting new industries.

Existing industries in Asheville may be surrounded by other uses, and may thus face difficulty when expanding their business. Businesses that are new to Asheville will most likely look towards greenfield development in more rural areas, and may not realize the benefits of an urban location.

10. Keep watch for properties that have the potential to be rezoned as industrial, especially as the ETJ expands.

Furthermore, staff has agreed to prepare this report, which will be distributed to the attendees of the focus group. Attendees will share this information with their respective memberships, and may invite staff to make presentations.

Attendees: Patty Beaver, CIBO
Jeff Slosman, Manufacturers Executive Association
Ray Denny, Chamber of Commerce